



Prescribed Fire at Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge

Using Prescribed Fire to Create Healthy Habitats at Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge

At the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), our mission is to restore, maintain, and protect healthy native habitats for wildlife and provide present and future generations the opportunity to connect with nature in wild places. To achieve this mission, we use a variety of tools to create healthy habitats and inspire a connection to nature, including removing invasive species, planting native shrubs and trees, and providing a variety of education and interpretive programs to meet our management goals.

Why is the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge doing a prescribed fire?

In 2013, the Refuge's long-term goals were identified in a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), which was a collaborative, public process. The CCP recommends the use of prescribed fire as an effective tool to restore several habitats on the Refuge. In the fall of 2016, a prescribed fire in the 4-acre "Oak Savanna Study Area" will be used as a tool to reduce invasive species, flammable vegetation, and aid in the restoration of healthy native forest habitat. Moreover, this will also serve

as a demonstration burn to provide the public an opportunity to see and learn about prescribed fire. We hope to continue to use prescribed fire as a



Forested habitat at Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge. ©Ed Bustya

restoration tool in future management activities on the Refuge.

Are prescribed fires common on national wildlife refuges?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has used prescribed fires to restore and maintain wildlife habitat around the country since the 1930s. Prescribed fire is essential to managing the majority of the Service's 150 million acres. The Service's Fire Management Program, a part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, includes a team of fire management professionals, who are experts in fire science, planning, ecology, and forestry. The Service currently has 500 full-time employees within the Fire Management Program with over 2,000 fire-certified employees who are nationally qualified to support wildfire incidences.

What is a prescribed fire and what are the benefits?

Prescribed fire is a very effective and sometimes necessary tool for managing healthy habitat. Unlike unintentional fires, which can be destructive and hard to control, prescribed fires are beneficial, carefully planned, and strategically located in areas where they can be monitored and manipulated by expert fire management professionals. Prescribed fire can reduce the spread of invasive species, allow nutrients in the soil to become more readily available, reduce flammable vegetation, and can increase native vegetation growth and the overall health of an ecosystem. In fact, some habitats, such as oak savanna and woodlands or pine forests, need fire to maintain their healthy ecological characteristics.

When will the prescribed fire at the Refuge take place?

The prescribed fire is planned to take place within the first 2 weeks of October. There are many factors that must be considered when planning a

prescribed fire, such as time of year, temperature, moisture content of the vegetation, wind direction, and other weather variables. All of these factors make up the "burn window." The fire will only be ignited when weather conditions are within the planned prescription. Due to the specific conditions necessary to allow for a prescribed fire to take place, the exact date and time will be determined within a day or on the burn day itself. The time and day of the fire will be announced on the Refuge website.

During the burn day, the surrounding trails will be temporarily closed and will re-open once fire management activities are complete and it is safe for the public.

What are the safety risks, and how are we managing them?

The Service is partnering with local fire management and community agencies to ensure all safety measures are taken to reduce risk to people and wildlife.

Safety risks of any prescribed fire include potential smoke impacts, undesired fire effects, and the unlikely but possible escape of fire outside of the planned area. A lot of planning has taken place to ensure that all safety measures are taken to reduce these risks, including the approval of a Prescribed Fire Plan written well in advance to the prescribed fire taking place. The Prescribed Fire Plan, written by Service Fire Management experts, addresses everything needed to plan for and implement the fire.

A prescribed fire is only conducted under its "prescription," or very specific conditions set out in the plan and depending upon available resources, time of year, weather and desired results.

Partners who are participating in the burn include the Service Fire Management Program, Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, and the National Park

Service. Consultation with the National Weather Service will take place before the ignition or lighting of the burn so that the amount and duration of smoke impact on the local community is reduced. A small “test fire” will also occur to ensure that the fire is providing its desired fire effects.

What are the smoke and health considerations?

Given the low amount of grass in the area, limited smoke is anticipated. Smoke will be visible from Highway 99 for the duration of the fire. Local businesses and residents should not smell smoke for more than a few hours. If you have concerns please call the Refuge at 503/625 5944.

What will happen to the wildlife in the area?

Given the relatively small area of the burn, it is unlikely that any birds or mammals will be harmed, but monitoring will take place to ensure their safety. Ultimately, the prescribed fire will help create healthier habitats for wildlife on the Refuge.

Questions?

For specific questions about the prescribed fire, please contact Erin Holmes, Refuge Manager: tualatinriver@fws.gov. 503/625 5944

For more information on the Refuge: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/tualatin_river/

For more information on the Fire Management Program go to: <https://www.fws.gov/fire>

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

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Tualatin River NWR Prescribed Fire Unit



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